

Purpose: To connect with those who have an active relationship with Church Doctor Ministries as peers in ministry, clients, and partners in prayer and support.

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What I've Learned in 18 Trips to England

"I'm excited about this upcoming trip to England," Sam shared over the phone. "Of course, I'm interested to learn about growing churches. But I look forward to getting into an English pub, too. I hear the food and friendliness are awesome!"

There was a pause of silence while Sam collected his thoughts. "And, we end up in London, right?"

"That's right," I assured him, guessing what might come next.

"I've heard London is fantastic. My wife and I are staying a few extra days to see the sights," Sam shared with enthusiasm.

"Yeah," I added, "London is one of my favorite cities in the world...maybe next to Paris. It's great. But you know, Sam, this is a learning experience, not primarily a vacation."

"Oh yeah," he said, almost a little apologetically.

"Sam," I responded, "We've taken more than 230 people to England. And, to a person, they've responded — on our exit survey — they will never be the same, every one of them. They

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Kazakhstan, India, the Philippines, South Korea, and England. Kent and Tracee Swank are authors of *Who Broke My Church? 7 Proven Strategies for Renewal and Revival*, which includes some of the insights learned in Great Britain. Each year, Church Doctor Ministries leads an annual 12-day trip to the U.K. for no more than 20 North Americans.



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MULTIPLYING MINISTRY

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- ▶ Forward it to staff and leaders in your church, denomination, network, or fellowship.

see and experience things in churches they've always dreamed about. And they are eager to see that occur in their churches back home. That's why we take people every year."

Catch What Can't Be Taught

Jesus taught the disciples. Yes, they learned. But there was much more. You can talk about a blind man being healed. But to see it happen? You can teach about giving up your life on a cross. But being there? Being an eyewitness? No comparison!

Consequently, this is my proclaimed inability to accomplish in you what can't be done in this *Church Doctor Report*. This issue can plant a seed. And God can nurture it, because He can do anything. That is my prayer. However, in the end, it won't be like being in England, touching, seeing, communicating, experiencing what God is doing in a revival.

The disciples of Jesus became apostles. Being sent into a mission culture changes everything — including what you're called. Yes, they were no longer disciples but apostles. Paul, likewise, has a designation for you and for every Christian: "ambassadors for Christ." The people led to faith by the apostles caught it, by the power of the gospel and the move of the Holy Spirit. They experienced it in another way. They experienced it because they let God in. They believed, not just with their minds, but also with their hearts. Even more, they jumped in even though the experience was over their heads.

Radical Change

When things are at their worst, God is at His best. That's what happened in England. That's what is occurring right now in American churches, among American Christians. That's what's happening in America as it travels down the road to uncivilization. That is what's going on in our country right now.

This climate of murders, addictions, suicides, disrespect for authority, rampant trends of secularization — all this leads to the deterioration of life as we know it. An example? We live in a time when people are intelligent enough to develop smartphones but may not be morally disciplined enough to use them in ways that help, not hurt.

After awhile in this deterioration, God uses this climate in two ways:

- 1) Christians in declining churches increasingly get a holy infection about their puny impact on the mess the world is in. The end result is that the Holy Spirit touches some people, in every congregation, with *holy discontent*.
- 2) Among those far from God, calling themselves "unbelievers," there is a growing hopelessness. "We can't go on this way as a nation. I fear for my grandchildren. What kind of world will they inherit? Will it even be safe enough for them to survive to age 30?" The end result among unbelievers is *holy receptivity*.

In the middle of this there are wonderful Christians who don't know how to deliver the Good News of Jesus Christ to those who don't know Him. These unbelievers realize they increasingly need *something*. They need Jesus, but they don't know it.

Role of Humility

Arrogant people seem almost impossible to change. Churches can't effectively reach arrogant unbelievers. God can't retrain arrogant Christians, either. If you are arrogant, even God can't help you. Nor can a Church Doctor. Nor can a trip to England.

In Scripture, humility is a key posture toward God and toward people, toward learning and toward the church. In Scripture, the focus is on character — not titles, not intelligence. Humble people acknowledge their own helplessness. Humility, in the New Testament, is a characteristic of openness to learn, grow, and change.

Jesus is the embodiment of humility. In Matthew 21:4-5 it says, "Behold, your King is coming to you, humble and mounted on an ass..." (from Isaiah 62:11). Jesus is not on a mighty warhorse. Instead, He rode into Jerusalem — triumphantly — on the humblest of animals, a donkey. He demonstrated His point.

In Psalm 149:4 it says, "...the LORD takes delight in His people; He crowns the humble with salvation." Jesus was very clear: "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matthew 23:12).

How are Christians in America being humbled? In ways very similar to what has happened in England more than 20 years ago:

- Declining church attendance
- An aging population in church
- Few younger people, ages 18 to 30
- A shortage of pastors
- Closed churches
- Churches sold, repurchased, becoming mosques
- Politically stressed denominations
- Clinging to past traditions
- Some churches becoming liberal, believing that if they relax theological teaching, unbelievers might attend church — only to discover it escalates decline
- Churches suffering from severe financial shortages
- A nation that increasingly has no credibility or usefulness for what the Christian church offers

These are just some of the ways God gets the attention of serious and committed Christians.

The Renewal Phase

Once God gets the attention of humble church members, He raises up a group in the congregation with holy discontent. Likely, they have experienced the challenges of declining Christianity in the nation as well. This decline is in numbers and influence — including lack of Christian influence upon the next generation.

Holy discontent is the work of the Holy Spirit. God touches certain Christians who are uncomfortable with the ineffectiveness of their church to reach the lost. They remain dedicated to their church. Their frustration is about the inability to make an impact on their community. They know their church has many strengths. Their discomfort is focused on lack of results.

TEN ACTION STEPS THAT CAN HELP YOUR CHURCH EXPERIENCE RENEWAL — BASED ON WHAT WE'VE LEARNED IN ENGLAND

Those with holy discontent are God's "early adopters" in a movement of spiritual renewal. The focus should be primarily on growing these "early adopters" in spiritual health and depth, as well as training them to become missionaries to unchurched people in their social networks. Some churches use the *Healthy Churches Thrive!* spiritual movement to facilitate this growth. In most churches, those with holy discontent will grow in numbers every year. This reflects that God is moving!

Your church experiences a tipping point when 40% to 50% of the active congregation have holy discontent. They provide focused momentum. It's almost unstoppable! It will change the entire culture of your church, over time. How much time? Two to three years. In this process, those *without* holy discontent will adapt to the "refreshed" spiritual culture of your church.

The end result is called *renewal*. When a congregation experiences renewal, the people conclude, "This is a different church than before!" It doesn't reflect a "perfect" church. There will always be challenges and difficulties. That is the nature of human beings, including Christians!

However, your church becomes more effective. As it becomes more effective, it will reach new people.

New people are excited about Jesus and their newfound faith. Renewal in churches sets the stage for God to bring revival to a nation or a general geographical area.

Young Adults

With every major movement in history (Christian and non-Christian), there is a parallel youth movement. This is critical. At first glance, it may sound challenging or even impossible. Many Christians in America will say, "Oh, great! We've already lost most of our youth." So did the renewal churches in England!

1. Develop a culture of humility.
2. Ask God for an insatiable appetite to learn and grow spiritually.
3. Read and meditate on God's Word daily.
4. Develop a small discipleship support group to share, encourage, and pray for one another, as you reflect on your relationship to: (1) God, (2) other Christians, and (3) non-Christians.
5. Get help from the outside, a ministry coach or church consultant.
6. Focus on your own personal transformation, not on your plateaued, declining, or challenged church.
7. Focus on the future, not the past.
8. Identify and nurture those with "holy discontent."
9. Begin developing a culture of sharing God stories. (Resource: podcast from Church Doctor Ministries channel on Apple podcast or Google Play.)
10. Use the book *Who Broke My Church? 7 Proven Strategies for Renewal and Revival* and the *Group Gathering Discussion Guide* for small groups and Bible studies with your church staff and leadership groups, to discuss Kingdom culture and relationally process what God can do to renew and ignite His people.

To grasp how God’s mission works, ask the question, “Who is the best person to reach a young adult?” The missionary answer is: “another young adult.” Not just any young adult, however. A Christian young adult who is:

- On fire for God
- Trained in spiritual development
- Equipped to be a missionary to others

This is why Church Doctor Ministries launched SEND North America, now in its sixth year of equipping young adults. Yes, we learned this from a church in England that has a similar ministry.

When we visit that British church, our group is amazed at the large number of young adults serving on staff. Not surprising, when our traveling group attends worship at some of these churches in the movement, they see congregations where the median age is between 20 and 30 years old. This is in stark contrast to the majority of U.K. churches that have dwindled down to 20 to 40 people, mostly in their seventies and eighties — a snapshot of many American churches in the coming years.

SEND is a 10-month training experience with 40 expert volunteer teachers. The young adults also experience God’s training to do these ministries:

- Witness their faith
- Work with children
- Minister to the elderly
- Pray with anyone, anywhere, for any reason
- Share a gospel message
- Work with homeless people
- Witness to Muslims
- Disciple others
- Minister in prisons
- Serve cross-culturally
- Lead a small group
- Teach a Bible class
- Raise support and report with accountability to donors
- Operate a youth or young adult ministry

SEND young adults are usually in their first year

KEY RESOURCES

Alpha USA. www.alphausa.org.

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Church Doctor Ministries England Immersion Excursion, www.churchdoctor.org.

Church Doctor Ministries Hot Springs, Arkansas, Immersion Excursion, www.churchdoctor.org.

The Damascus Road: Where Christians Become Missionaries (video series), www.churchdoctor.org.

Davis, Andrew M. *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017.

after high school, first year after college, or partway through college — taking a year’s break to discover more about themselves before they choose a major.

The U.S. is following England in another trend: Fewer people are attending seminary or Bible college to become pastors. The long training period, the cost of education, and the generally lower pay contribute to the smaller number of formally trained pastors available. With fewer young people in churches, there are fewer young adults considering full-time pastoral ministry. Further, the dramatic number of baby boomer pastors retiring presents an increasing burden for churches to find a new pastor. SEND young adults are in great demand for church staffs. As trained missionaries, they can train others in the church — including some who have graduated from a seminary or a Bible college but missed out on mission training or experience.

Multiplication

One of the most powerful dimensions of what we see in the British revival movement is churches that “hive off” a portion of those with holy discontent to start another ministry that is separate in location but remains attached to the church at “arm’s length.”

In mission school, there is a saying that reflects the strategic power of multiplication: “It’s easier to give birth than to raise the dead.” While it sounds a little harsh, it does get your attention! It doesn’t mean that people in a plateaued church are spiritually “dead.” However, as every pastor knows, it’s an uphill battle. It takes time to create positive change in churches. Many Christians love God but hate change. They are wonderful believers who will die and end up in heaven. But, they are spiritually focused on heaven and their own church maintenance. They are “so heavenly minded, they’re no earthly good,” one mission professor told me. By that, he meant they are not directly interested in reaching the lost if it causes them discomfort.

The “hive off” principle is not complicated:

1. Identify those who have holy discontent.
2. Equip them through something like *Healthy Churches Thrive!* to grow spiritually.
3. Train them in the adult DVD series *The Damascus Road: Where Christians Become Missionaries*, used in SEND Plus — for those who want to learn what young adults learn in SEND but can’t leave home, jobs, and/or children/family for 10 months.
4. Identify the pioneers and spiritual entrepreneurs from among those with holy

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- Gumbel, Nicky. *Why Jesus?* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2017.
- Hawthorne, Andy. *Diary of a Dangerous Vision: Mad for Jesus (the Vision of the Message Trust)*. London, UK: Survivor, 2004.
- Hawthorne, Andy. *Hope Unleashed: Serving God through Words and Actions*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009.
- Healthy Churches Thrive!*
www.churchdoctor.org
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discontent. They are those who would love to “do something new.”

5. The leader of the SEND Center (which is an extension of your church) is under “arm’s length” supervision by the pastor of your church, through a relationship that is low control balanced by high accountability.
6. Your church could have any number of these SEND Centers. They are all mission-directed groups.
7. They start in a home and grow into rented facilities.
8. When they get to the size that the maintenance is above 40% to 50%, they “hive off” another group of entrepreneurial mission-minded people to start another SEND Center, connected with the same church.
9. Every SEND Center is an extension of the same church, which could, collectively, grow much larger, much faster. The most extraordinary blessing is that they are able to reach unchurched people more effectively. The relationship between every SEND Center remains close with the church. Occasional celebrations provide opportunities for all the people of the church and its extensions to celebrate together. At such celebrations, everyone can experience the rapid growth of God’s Kingdom!

Learning from England

In John 5:19, Jesus said, “I only do what I see the Father doing.” What does that mean? It means, instead of dreaming up some program and praying like crazy for God to bless it, approach it like Jesus says. Look around and find where God is working, moving, and blessing, and join Him there. That’s why we take groups to England and why we visit the churches. They have been blessed by the move of God. We continue to learn. How can humble people do anything else? What about you?

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